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SUBJECT: (SBU) Deputy Secretary Lew's June 12, 2009
Meeting with Singapore Permanent Secretary Peter Ho

¶1. (U) Classified by EAP DAS Scot Marciel. Reasons: 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶2. (SBU) June 12, 2009; 2:15 p.m.; Washington, D.C.

¶3. (SBU) Participants:

U.S.
Deputy Secretary Lew
Scot Marciel, EAP DAS
Mary-Gardner Coppola, EAP/MTS (Notetaker)

SINGAPORE
Permanent Secretary Peter Ho
Ambassador Chan Heng Chee
Ng Teck Hean, Foreign Affairs Americas Director
Ravidnran Alfred, Foreign Affairs Country Officer
Sharon Chan, First Secretary

¶4. (C) SUMMARY. Singapore Permanent Secretary Peter Ho told Deputy Secretary Lew on June 12 that during recent meetings with Burmese Senior General Than Shwe, Singapore Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong reiterated the Secretary's concern that the likely conviction of Aung Sung Suu Kyi (ASSK) would make it difficult for the United States to improve relations with Burma. Ho relayed to the Deputy Secretary a complete account of Goh's conversations with the Burmese leadership between June 8 and 11. The Deputy Secretary thanked Ho for the readout and noted the importance of Than Shwe's receiving this message from Goh, considering the Burmese general's isolation from outside views. Singapore will also brief UN Special Envoy to Burma Ibrahim Gambari about Goh's visit to assist Gambari with preparations for UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's expected visit to Burma in July. The Deputy Secretary asked that the Singapore government consider providing aid for the Pakistanis displaced by the recent conflict in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province. END SUMMARY.

BURMA: SINGAPORE PASSES U.S. MESSAGE

¶5. (C) Ho briefed the Deputy Secretary on Singapore Senior Minister Goh's visit to Burma June 8-11, where he met first with Prime Minister Thein Sein, and then with Senior General Than Shwe, who was accompanied by his top five generals: Vice Senior General Maung Aye, General Chief of Staff Thura Shwe Mann, Prime Minister Thein Sein, and Secretary 1 Tin Aung Mying Oo. In advance of Ho's meeting with Deputy Secretary Lew, Goh sent Ho a detailed readout of his discussions with the Burmese leadership and requested that Ho pass this information to the Deputy Secretary.

GOH'S READOUT

¶6. (C) Goh stated he was old friends with Thein Sein and

Than Shwe, which meant they engaged in candid and frank discussion about the current situation in Burma. Goh emphasized to the Burmese the importance of the 2010 elections. The international community was watching the proceedings very closely and it was critical that they be perceived as legitimate and credible by not only the Burmese, but also the international community.

¶17. (C) Goh informed the Burmese that Secretary Clinton had called Foreign Minister Yeo and warned that how the Burmese handle the ASSK case could upset the U.S. review of its Burma policy. Goh added that while everyone understood that the trial was an internal matter for Burma, it also had clear international implications. One only had to look at the U.S. President's genuine outreach to countries with historically strained relations with the United States to understand Burma's window of opportunity.

¶18. (C) Goh also passed the Secretary's message that American John Yettaw's unauthorized swim to ASSK's compound was the act of an individual and in no way connected to the U.S. government. He emphasized to the Burmese that it would not make sense for the U.S. government to engage in such behavior given its genuine attempts to convey to the Burmese its desire for engagement. [Note: DAS Marciel noted the significance of Goh's providing a rationale for why the United States was not involved, because Than Shwe is isolated from informed views of current events. End Note.] Goh told Than Shwe that if ASSK were shut out of the 2010 electoral process, the entire effort would lack legitimacy. If she were jailed, Singapore and the international community would view the Burmese generals as using the Yettaw incident to deny ASSK the chance to campaign for her party.

¶19. (C) In response to Goh's message, Than Shwe reportedly described ASSK as being difficult to talk with due to her insistence on maintaining a hard-line position. According to Than Shwe, this forced him to make the choice between stability and accommodating ASSK's demands. Than Shwe blamed ASSK for the international sanctions, but he was prepared to meet with her if she called for lifting of sanctions. Furthermore, she must cease her confrontational approach towards Than Shwe and rather accept the role of the Burmese military in maintaining unity.

¶10. (C) Goh noted to Than Shwe that ASSK had not been confrontational when she met with foreign diplomats just prior to her trial. Instead she had advocated for national reconciliation, and remarked that she reserved hope that something good could come out of the trial. He added that ASSK had declared she did not want to use the Yettaw incident to strike out at the generals.

¶11. (C) Goh relayed in his report that while he believed the Burmese generals heard Goh's message, it remained unclear how far they were willing to go to address the concerns of the international community. Singapore planned to provide a similar brief to Gambari, who likely will travel soon to Burma to prepare for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon's expected July visit. Singapore will suggest that Gambari encourage ASSK and the generals to resume direct talks to move towards national reconciliation. In conclusion, Goh requested the United States reinforce Singapore's messages with relevant stakeholders.

¶12. (C) Ho noted the Burmese have the ability to make a gesture to the international community with how they respond to ASSK's likely conviction, but the question is whether they find it politically expedient to make such a gesture. At the same time, Ho believed it important that Than Shwe did not react to Goh's message in an overly negative manner.

COOPERATION IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

¶13. (C) The Deputy Secretary thanked Singapore for its ongoing contributions to Afghanistan, including its most recent commitment of a battlefield radar system and supporting personnel. He described the ongoing challenges facing the internal refugees in Pakistan and requested Singapore consider providing assistance to efforts in that region. Ho stated Singapore was monitoring the situation carefully, particularly in light of Pakistan's weak governance structure. The Deputy Secretary noted Pakistan had appointed an experienced general to address the situation.

CLINTON